

# ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

*LAUDATO SI'*



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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## OVERVIEW

Pope Francis' encyclical letter [Laudato Si'](#) was released in June 2015. Five years later, in 2020, Pope Francis invited all Catholics and people of good will to celebrate the fifth year anniversary of this important encyclical and to take action to better care for our common home. Also in 2020, Pope Francis issued an apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia* [*Beloved Amazon*], which drew heavily from *Laudato Si'* and from the reflections of participants in the Special Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region on October 6-27, 2019 on topics such as "the cry of the poor," exploitation of the resources and the original peoples of the Amazon region, and action to care for God's creation.

The guide includes materials for prayer, reflection and discussion, as well as ideas to help Catholics respond to Pope Francis' call in *Laudato Si'*. The discussion section of the guide includes quotes and discussion questions on a variety of themes highlighted in *Laudato Si'*. The facilitator should decide in advance which topics will be covered during this session. Given the number of rich themes on which Pope Francis focuses in *Laudato Si'*, you may wish to spread the topics among several sessions. A separate [study guide for Querida Amazonia](#) is also available.

## MATERIALS

At least a week in advance, make the following materials available to participants:

- A full copy of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. You can order copies of the encyclical from <http://store.usccb.org/>, or get the text of the encyclical online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).
- The "Social Encyclical Primer" handout, included with this facilitator's guide

Bring to the session (or make available electronically):

- A few extra copies of the encyclical
- Copies of the "Social Encyclical Primer" handout
- Copies of the "Action Ideas" handout

## ROOM SET-UP

Arrange the chairs in a circle and set up a prayer space with an open Bible on a low table in the center of the circle.

Open the Bible to Genesis 1.

## MEETING OUTLINE

### I. Introductions – 5 minutes

Invite everyone to briefly introduce himself or herself, and to share why he or she came. Keep the introductions brief.

### II. Opening Prayer & Introductory Reflections – 5 minutes

Invite everyone to place herself or himself in the presence of God.



Reader: Read the Story of Creation in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3.

*Pause* for silent reflection on the Word of God for about 20 seconds.

Leader: Together, we now pray the Canticle of the Creatures, from St. Francis of Assisi.

All:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
who is the day and through whom you give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;  
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather  
through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night,  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.<sup>1</sup>

### III. Background Information – 5 minutes

Welcome everyone and remind them that the purpose of the gathering is to reflect in faith on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. The title is taken from the first line of the encyclical, "Laudato Si', mi Signore," or "Praise be to you, my Lord." In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

An "encyclical" is a letter that is a teaching document by the Holy Father. A "social encyclical" applies the consistent, traditional moral teachings of the Church to the social and economic challenges of the current day. Use the "Social Encyclical Primer" handout to provide additional background information on social encyclicals, including a list of previous social encyclicals and the themes they addressed.

### IV. Discussion – 30 minutes

Provide some guidelines for the discussion. Remind the participants that the purpose of the discussion is to explore our faith and how we are to live it out in the world, not to debate with one another. Some groups find it helpful to use the "mutual invitation" method to move the sharing

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<sup>1</sup> ©1999 Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY. Francis of Assisi: Early Documents – The Saint, Vol 1, pg 113-114, edited by Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short published by New City Press, Hyde Park, NY. Used with permission.

along. Each participant shares his or her reflections to a question, and then invites another person who has not shared to do so. Be sure that everyone has an opportunity to respond to each question.

To help create a positive space for faith sharing, ask the participants to observe these simple guidelines:

- Listen carefully.
- Use “I” statements. (Take responsibility for what you express. Do not speak for “them.”)
- Help all to participate. (Do not dominate.)
- Stay on the topic and stay focused on Pope Francis’ message.
- Be respectful and charitable at all times.

Use the discussion pages below.

## V. Follow up Actions – 10 minutes

Review the handout on “Taking Action.” Invite members of the group to discuss and share ways they can act on what they have learned as family members, workers, owners, consumers, and voters.

- Brainstorm what lifestyle changes you can make as an individual or family to reduce your own consumption in order to better protect God’s creation.
- Join the U.S. Catholic bishops and other Catholic groups to advocate for laws and policies that address environmental problems, especially as they affect poor and vulnerable people.
- As a family, parish, school, or other community, take the St. Francis Pledge ([CatholicClimateCovenant.org](http://CatholicClimateCovenant.org)) to care for creation and persons in poverty.

## Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Prayer Leader: Let us close by offering intentions based on today’s reflections and conversation. In a moment, I will start us off with a couple of examples. I invite you to then add your own. After each intention, we will respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

- We pray for the gift of awe and wonder, that we may recognize God’s creation as gift, let us pray to the Lord...
- We pray for God’s help to work together to protect our common home, let us pray to the Lord...



*After participants are done offering intentions, conclude with the following prayer from Laudato Si'.*

### A Christian prayer in union with creation

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.  
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;  
they are yours, filled with your presence and your  
tender love.  
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,  
through you all things were made.  
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,  
you became part of this earth,  
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.  
Today you are alive in every creature  
in your risen glory.  
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light  
you guide this world towards the Father's love  
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.  
You also dwell in our hearts  
and you inspire us to do what is good.  
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,  
teach us to contemplate you  
in the beauty of the universe,

for all things speak of you.  
Awaken our praise and thankfulness  
for every being that you have made.  
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined  
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world  
as channels of your love  
for all the creatures of this earth,  
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.  
Enlighten those who possess power and money  
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,  
that they may love the common good, advance the  
weak,  
and care for this world in which we live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.  
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,  
help us to protect all life,  
to prepare for a better future,  
for the coming of your Kingdom  
of justice, peace, love and beauty.  
Praise be to you!  
Amen.

### Dismissal or Fellowship

Thank the participants for sharing their reflections and wish them safe travel home. Or, you may wish to invite participants to share in refreshments and fellowship after the session. Some groups may want to close with sharing the sign of peace. If there will be future sessions, be sure to announce details about the next meeting.



## OUR COMMON HOME

"I urgently appeal . . . for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all." (no. 14)

"The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all." (no. 23)

"The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change." (no. 13)

### Questions

1. Pope Francis calls for dialogue that includes "everyone." Who should be included in the conversation who may currently not be? With whom are Catholics called to dialogue about the future of our common home?
2. The climate belongs to all and is meant for all, yet a disproportionate amount of the earth's resources are consumed by the United States and other wealthy countries. What does Pope Francis propose must happen in order to address this?

## A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUE

"The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God." (no. 86)

"Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone." (no. 93)

"Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered." (no. 70)

### Questions

1. What does nature teach us about the Creator? Has your own experience of the created world helped you to pray or communicate with God?
2. When we fail to care for creation, what impact does this have on our relationship with ourselves, others, God and the earth?
3. Reflecting on the Creation Story in Genesis 1:1-2:3, as well as other Scriptural passages that Pope Francis mentions in Chapter 1 of *Laudato Si'*, how does Scripture call us to care for God's creation?
4. Pope Francis addressed his encyclical to "all people" (no. 3). Why do you think he did this?



## WE ARE NOT GOD

"We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us." (no. 67)

"When human beings place themselves at the center, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative. . . . It is also the mindset of those who say: Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage." (no. 122-123)

"A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power." (no. 78)

### Questions

1. How has the incorrect vision of humans' role in the world that Pope Francis describes in the quotes above contributed to many of the problems Pope Francis named in chapter 1, such as pollution, climate change, access to safe, drinkable water, loss of biodiversity, and global inequality?
2. Read paragraphs 67-69 of *Laudato Si'*. How does Pope Francis' explanation of the correct interpretation of Gen. 1:28 (about humans having "dominion" over the earth) help clarify our role in caring for the earth?

## INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

"Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society." (no. 91)

"A true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*" (no. 49)

"We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature." (no. 139)

### Questions

1. Integral ecology links care for people and care for God's creation. How is our concern for our fellow human beings connected to our concern for the environment?
2. Pope Francis encourages us to listen *both* to the cry of the earth *and* the cry of the poor (no. 49). What happens when we are attuned to only one or the other?



## CARE FOR PERSONS IN POVERTY

"Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited. For example, changes in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate; this in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. . . . Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded." (no. 25)

"The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings." (no. 109)

"A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress." (no. 194)

### Questions

1. Re-read paragraphs 25 to 31 and 48 to 52 of *Laudato Si'*. How are persons in poverty—who contribute to it the least—often impacted the worst by environmental devastation?
2. Read paragraphs 11 to 19 in Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, [\*Querida Amazonia\*](#), on the impact of exploitation of resources and environmental destructions on the original peoples of the Amazon region. How do the experiences of our brothers and sisters in the Amazon region illustrate the limitations of technological and economic development when "a view to profit" is prioritized over care for persons and our common home?
3. Why and how does our faith call us to respond?

## CREATING A CULTURE OF SOLIDARITY, ENCOUNTER AND RELATIONSHIP

"We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family." (no. 52)

"When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of 'might is right' has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus." (no. 82)

"An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries." (no. 164)

### Questions

1. Reflecting on the above quote, and also on paragraphs 96 to 100 of *Laudato Si'*, how is the vision of "might is right" at odds with Jesus' life, witness and teaching?
2. What values should instead be reflected in our local, national and global relationships, and in our conversation around addressing environmental issues? What changes in attitudes, perspectives, and actions might these values lead to?
3. As Pope Francis points out, we live in an interdependent world. What is our responsibility to other members of the human family, given this interdependence?

## CLIMATE CHANGE

"Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades." (no. 25)

"Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it." (no. 23)

### Questions

1. What are you observing locally or in other parts of the country or world that causes you to think about climate change?
2. What changes can we make to our lifestyles, production and consumption to better care for one another and creation?



## PROTECTING HUMAN LIFE

"Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity. So we cannot fail to consider the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture." (no. 43)

"When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected." (no. 117)

"To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized." (no. 50)

### Questions

1. How can we work to protect all God's creatures, including those who live in poverty and the unborn?
2. What contributions does our unique Catholic perspective bring to the environmental movement?

## GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

"In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters." (no. 158)

"A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water." (no. 164)

"Enforceable international agreements are urgently needed. . . . Global regulatory norms are needed to impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions, for example, when powerful companies dump contaminated waste or offshore polluting industries in other countries." (no. 173)

### Questions

1. Why does Pope Francis speak of the need for a "global consensus" to address environmental challenges effectively?
2. How is the United States called to fulfill our obligations in justice to those who are poor in developing countries?



## EUCHARIST AND CREATION

"The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, 'creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation." (no. 236)

"Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption." (no. 222)

### Questions

1. How does the Eucharist inspire and motivate our concern for the environment? How should Sunday worship impact weekday witness?
2. How does (or should) our Christian spirituality influence our lifestyles?

## A TIME TO ACT—AS INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

"Believers themselves must constantly be challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions." (no. 200)

"All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education." (no. 214)

"Local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land." (no. 179)

### Questions

1. How are you individually called to participate in caring for God's creation?
2. How can we encourage a serious dialogue in the Catholic community—in our parishes, schools, colleges, universities and other settings—on the significant ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis?
3. What efforts are happening in our local community that individuals, families, and Catholic communities can participate in?

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Mass of Corpus Domini* (15 June 2006): AAS 98 (2006), 513.

## A TIME TO ACT – CIVIL AND POLITICAL LEADERS

“To take up these responsibilities and the costs they entail, politicians will inevitably clash with the mindset of short-term gain and results which dominates present-day economics and politics. But if they are courageous, they will attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility.” (no. 181)

“Public pressure has to be exerted in order to bring about decisive political action. Society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment. Local legislation can be more effective, too, if agreements exist between neighboring communities to support the same environmental policies.” (no. 179)

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (no. 160)

### Questions

1. How can faith communities in the United States be involved in exerting pressure on leaders and governments, both locally and nationally, to be more responsible stewards of creation?
2. What ideas do you have to help civil and political leaders make decisions and policies that will benefit the generations to come, instead of only considering the short-term?

## A REASON TO HOPE

“Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life.” (no. 225)

“The God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil. Injustice is not invincible.” (no. 74)

“We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world.” (no. 212)

### Questions

1. In the face of vast challenges, why does our faith call us to hope?
2. How can we live out God’s vision for healed and renewed relationships with God, self, others and creation?



## SOCIAL ENCYCLICAL PRIMER

Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* was released in June 2015. This encyclical, or teaching document, is the latest in a series of social encyclicals written by our popes over the last 125 years, as the Church sought to apply its moral principles and social teaching to emerging economic and social problems.

Jesus Christ is both divine and human. In his person, he embodies what it is to live a fully human life. He is the model of how we are called to live. His teaching has both personal and social implications. These social encyclicals shine the light of the Gospel of Christ and the Church's moral teaching on changing social circumstances, to provide guidance and support to Christians as we seek to live our faith in the world. In this way, the teaching is both very traditional and ever new.

Here are highlights from some of the encyclicals that are part of the Church's modern body of social teaching:

[\*Rerum Novarum\*](#) (*On the Condition of Labor*) 1891, Pope Leo XIII – Essentially the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching, truly groundbreaking, and a foundational document for many subsequent encyclicals (see below). This encyclical addresses the plight of workers in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, touching on issues that include socialism, unbridled capitalism, a living wage, workers' rights, support for unions, and a rejection of class struggle. Pope Leo XIII first articulated the principles that underlie the preferential option for the poor.

[\*Quadragesimo Anno\*](#) (*On the Reconstruction of the Social Order*) 1931, Pope Pius XI – Commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical offers an update on the state of labor and industrialization, and strong critiques of communism, unrestrained capitalism, class conflict, and inequalities. Pope Pius XI denounces the concentration of wealth and economic power, and calls for the reconstruction of the social order based on subsidiarity.

[\*Mater et Magistra\*](#) (*Christianity and Social Progress*) 1961, St. John XXIII – Issued 70 years after *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical looks to the Church as the "Mother and Teacher," calling the world to salvation and better social relationships. It looks at science and technology, noting their power to improve the human condition, but also to limit human freedoms, and calling on governments to safeguard human rights. St. John XXIII expressed concerns for the growing gap between rich and poor nations, for the plight of farmers and rural areas, and for the arms race. The encyclical calls on wealthier nations to help poorer ones.

[\*Pacem in Terris\*](#) (*Peace on Earth*) 1963, St. John XXIII – Issued only two months before the pope's death, this encyclical is the first to be directed to "all men of good will," instead of just to Catholics. In a response to the Cold War, the encyclical outlines necessary conditions for lasting world peace, looking at respect for human rights and disarmament. St. John XXIII calls for the development of a world authority to protect the universal common good, condemns the arms race, and supports efforts to build peace.



[\*Populorum Progressio\*](#) (*On the Development of Peoples*) 1967, St. Paul VI – This encyclical examines the economy on a global level, and addresses the rights of workers to decent work, just wages, decent working conditions, and to form and join unions. Blessed Paul VI calls development the new name for peace, criticizes unjust economic structures that lead to inequality, and supports new international and social relationships.

[\*Laborem Exercens\*](#) (*On Human Work*) 1981, St. John Paul II – Issued to mark the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical once again emphasizes the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and the priority of labor over capital. St. John Paul II also addresses disabled workers, emigration, materialism, and the spirituality of work.

[\*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis\*](#) (*On Social Concern*) 1987, St. John Paul II – This encyclical honored *Populorum Progressio* on its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, offering solidarity as a central requirement of our faith and times. St. John Paul II critiques East-West blocs and other “structures of sin” that compromise the progress of poor nations, and calls for solidarity between rich and poor nations.

[\*Centesimus Annus\*](#) (*The Hundredth Year*) 1991, St. John Paul II – On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, St. John Paul II reflected on the current state of issues that Leo XIII had addressed in his day. It focuses on the moral dimensions of economic life, the advantages and limitations of the market, the role of business, and the responsibilities and limitations of government.

[\*Evangelium Vitae\*](#) (*The Gospel of Life*) 1995, St. John Paul II – An affirmation of the gift of human life and the need to protect it, this encyclical explored many threats to human life, including the evils of abortion, euthanasia, and the use of the death penalty. It called the Church to be “a people of life and for life.”

[\*Deus Caritas Est\*](#) (*God is Love*) 2005, Pope Benedict XVI – Benedict's first encyclical emphasized the connections between love of God and love of neighbor. Pope Benedict XVI wrote the Church could no more neglect charity than it could Scripture or the sacraments. He located love of the poor at the center of Catholic life.

[\*Caritas In Veritate\*](#) (*Charity in Truth*) 2009, Pope Benedict XVI – This encyclical followed up on the themes of St. Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*. It dealt with the ethics of contemporary economics; poverty and development; global solidarity; charity, justice, and the common good; rights and duties; and care for creation, among other topics.

[\*Laudato Si' \(Praise Be\)\*](#) 2015, Pope Francis – This encyclical calls the Church and the world to acknowledge the moral and social dimensions of the ecological crisis. It emphasizes the beauty of nature, the effects of industrialization on the environment, and the importance of integral ecology. Francis provides a thorough analysis of human life and its three intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with creation.



## TAKING ACTION

### Taking Action at Home

Brainstorm what lifestyle changes you can make as an individual or family to reduce your own consumption in order to better protect God's creation. Here are some ideas based on those Pope Francis mentions in *Laudato Si'* (no. 211):

1. Use fewer paper and plastic products – e.g. use a re-usable water bottle
2. Reduce water consumption – e.g. take shorter showers, wash dishes by hand, etc.
3. Don't cook more than you will consume
4. Compost (instead of disposing) food waste
5. Recycle
6. Reuse instead of disposing
7. Use public transportation, carpool, walk, or ride a bike
8. Conserve electricity – e.g. turn off lights and buy energy-efficient appliances
9. Plant trees

### Taking Action in my Parish, at School, or at Work

Brainstorm what institutional changes you can make in your parish, faith community, school or workspace. Here are a few ideas:

1. At Catholic institutions, ensure that learning about care for God's creation is part of formation for both adults and youth. Educational resources, homily helps, and more are at [www.usccb.org/environment](http://www.usccb.org/environment). A study guide for *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis' 2020 post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation is also available.
2. During [Laudato Si' week](#) (May 16-24, 2020), which was established by Pope Francis, plan activities to engage your parish to pray, learn and act in response to *Laudato Si'*.
3. Do an energy audit to identify where energy consumption could be reduced. Such an audit will benefit both the earth and your institution's budget!
4. Consider going solar. Explore whether efforts are happening in your local community to form solar cooperatives, in which institutions purchase affordable solar energy in bulk.
5. Implement recycling and composting.
6. At events where food or beverages are consumed, and in cafeterias, replace disposable cups, plates, and silverware with washable or compostable items.
7. Donate leftovers to local soup kitchens, or cook only what will be reasonably consumed.
8. Offer employees benefits for using public transportation or carpooling.
9. Conserve electricity – e.g. turn off lights and air conditioning during non-business hours and buy energy-efficient appliances.
10. Plant trees on your institution's property.
11. Take the St. Francis Pledge (below).
12. Find out about and join efforts to care for creation in your local community.
13. Find out what other faith communities across the United States are doing to care for God's creation: [www.wearesaltandlight.org/success-stories-act](http://www.wearesaltandlight.org/success-stories-act).





## Taking Action in my State

1. Encourage lawmakers to improve and update public transportation options. When effective and far-reaching public transportation systems are in place, fewer cars clog the roads to emit greenhouse gases and air-polluting contaminants.
2. Join local efforts of groups working with elected officials and community leaders to explore ways your local community can do business in sustainable ways, reduce harmful emissions, and use renewal energy.
3. Organize or participate in local and state Earth Day celebrations to raise awareness of the challenges of climate change and move towards sustainability.
4. Pay attention to legislation going before the state legislature that concern climate, emissions, or energy policies. Urge legislators to remember that people who live in poverty in your state may suffer the most from climate change and that legislative measures should include provisions that address disproportionate economic impacts, e.g., in heating and transportation costs.
5. Consider how we can allow the Holy Spirit to move us toward innovative, creative solutions that create jobs and care for people and God's creation.

## Taking Action Nationally

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is urging that any legislative action on climate change include provisions that (a) ease the burden on low-income communities and those who live in poverty; (b) offer relief for workers who may be displaced because of climate change policies; and (c) promote the development and use of alternate renewable and clean-energy resources, including the transfer of such technologies and technical assistance that may be appropriate and helpful to developing countries in meeting the challenges of climate change. Write to your senators and representatives in Congress to let them know that you care about climate change and support action on a national level that includes the three key priorities above. For background information on the issue, go to [www.usccb.org/environment](http://www.usccb.org/environment) and the Catholic Climate Covenant [catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://catholicclimatecovenant.org).

Across the United States, Catholics are taking the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor and joining the Catholic Climate Covenant. The St. Francis Pledge is a promise and a commitment by Catholic individuals, families, parishes, organizations and institutions to live our faith by protecting God's Creation and advocating on behalf of people in poverty who face the harshest impacts of global climate change. To join the Covenant, you commit to act on each of the five elements of the St. Francis Pledge.



## The St. Francis Pledge

I/We Pledge to:

- PRAY and REFLECT on the duty to care for God's Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- LEARN about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- ASSESS how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations- contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.
- ACT to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.
- ADVOCATE for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Environment/Environmental Justice page (<http://www.usccb.org/environment>)

The Catholic Church brings a distinct perspective to the discussion of environmental questions, by lifting up the moral dimensions of these issues and the needs of the most vulnerable among us. This unique contribution is rooted in Catholic teaching calling us to care for creation and for "the least of these" (Mt 25:40). This page includes helpful materials and resources such as:

- [Caring for God's Creation: Resources for Liturgy, Preaching, and Taking Action](#)
- [Church Teaching on Ecology](#)
- [Primer on Care for Creation](#)
- [Pastoral Aids and Homily Helps for Catholic Social Teaching: Care for Creation/Stewardship](#)
- [Querida Amazonia \[Beloved Amazon\] Study Guide](#)
- [Background on Global Climate Change](#)
- [U.S. Catholic bishops' statement on Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good](#)
- Stories about [communities supporting environmental justice](#) with help from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development

Catholic Climate Covenant ([www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/)) brings Catholic people and institutions together to care for the people God loves and to live justly on God's earth. Visit the website to access resources, stories, opportunities for action, and the [St. Francis Pledge](#).

Catholic Relief Services (<https://www.crs.org/climate-change>)

CRS shares stories from the field about how climate change is impacting vulnerable communities with whom Catholic Relief Services works.



Laudato Si' Advocates Program (<http://www.usccb.org/environment>) The U.S. Catholic bishops' Environmental Justice Program (EJP), in association with the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), have introduced an initiative called the *Laudato Si'* Advocates Program. The Program is designed to equip college-age individuals with skills to advocate for legislation that promotes the integral ecology described in *Laudato Si'*. Advocates receive a small stipend, attend a training summit in Washington, D.C., and receive instruction in advocacy.

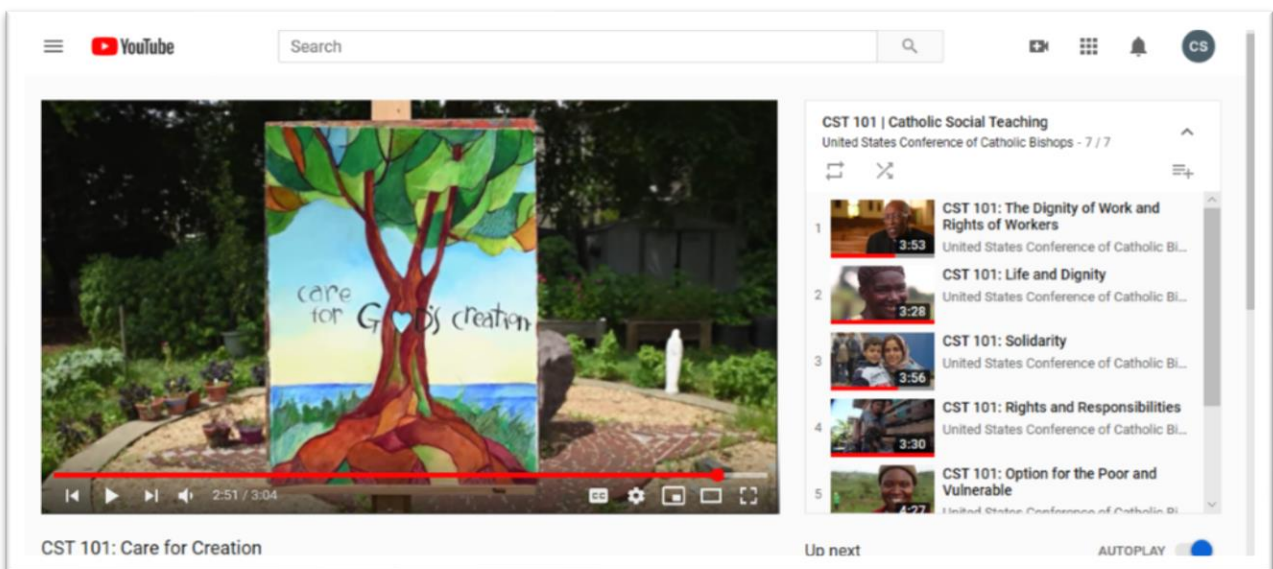
We Are Salt and Light ([WeAreSaltAndLight.org](http://WeAreSaltAndLight.org))

This new website of the United States Catholic Bishops' Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development helps Catholics respond to Jesus' call to be "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Mt. 5:13-16). The website includes resources, assessment tools, videos, and more than 100 [inspiring stories](#) of real Catholic communities being salt and light. A number of stories feature local examples of Catholic communities caring for creation.

More Catholic Social Teaching on Care for God's Creation

Two statements of the Catholic bishops of the United States focus specifically on care for God's creation: [Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good](#) (2001) and [Renewing the Earth](#) (1991).

The CST101 video from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services provides a brief summary of Catholic teaching on caring for God's creation. It is available at <https://youtu.be/TCcl7DoGRW0>.



Children's Books on Caring for God's Creation ([www.usccb.org/twofeet](http://www.usccb.org/twofeet))

Created in collaboration with Loyola Press, *Green Street Park* and *Drop by Drop* offer parents, teachers and children in grades K-5, examples of how to participate in solutions to important problems that affect the lives and dignity of others. Both storybooks focus on caring for God's creation.



In *Green Street Park*, Philip learns about how St. Francis of Assisi loved God's world and cared for it. His teacher, Sr. Mary Clare, challenges Philip and his friends to act as St. Francis would. With help from their parents, the children engage the mayor and the entire community in fixing their park.

In *Drop by Drop*, a U.S. classroom gets a visit from a worker for [Catholic Relief Services](http://www.catholicrelief.org), who tells the story of a village in the country of Burkina Faso, in Africa. The story is about a girl named Sylvie, who is unable to attend school because it takes her several hours every day to collect the water her family needs. Her community becomes involved in a special Water Project, and the class of students in the U.S. decides to help other communities like Sylvie's have access to water.

